

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF WHOLISTIC APPROACH OF EVANGELISM IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

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This study clarifies the wholistic ministry approach that the early church performed in doing evangelism and is based on Acts 2:42-47. In order to clarify the wholistic ministry approach (communion, community, character and commission) that the church does, this study provides biblical and theological foundation of it.

Key Words: Wholistic ministry, communion, community, character, commission

1. Introduction

There are many passages in Old Testament and in New Testament mention about the mission of the people of God. “The Bible clearly teaches that we must evangelize.”¹

“The Seventh-day Adventist Church is a growth organization. The church has had a vital interest in quantitative growth as it views its progress toward fulfilling its mission.”² “The church as a local church is the action center for the Seventh-day Adventist organization.”³

“A Well-known Scripture passage, Act 2:42-47⁴, details the intermediate aims of early Christian. This passage delineates the component parts of our ultimate educational purpose.”⁵

In Acts 2:42-47 we read: “And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles. And all that believed were together, and had all things common; and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need. And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.”

Habermas says, “This passage does not exhaust the directives entrusted to God’s people. But it does provide a superb list of sub points pertinent to reconciliation. Specifically, the church’s responsibilities can be broken down into four themes:

- Communion
- Community
- Character

¹ David A. White, *Your Church Can Multiply* (Mandaluyong City: Philippine Challenge, Inc, 2000), 4.

² Kenneth O. Swanson, *A Training Program for the Elder, Deacon, and Deaconess* (D. Min. Project Report, Andrews University, 1984), 1.

³ Ministerial Association Asia-Pacific Division of SDA, *Handbook for Church Leaders* (Manila: Philippine, 1998), 16.

⁴ All English quotations from Scripture are taken from *The New King James Bible* unless otherwise indicated.

⁵ Ronald T. Habermas, *Teaching for Reconciliation: Foundations and Practice of Christian Educational Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1992), 48.

– Commission”⁶

In another book Habermas said that the reconciliation is Christian Maturity.⁷ “Communion with God, just described as our ultimate purpose, highlights our primary vertical responsibility. Our three remaining duties (all horizontal in nature) identify complementary themes of Community, Character, and Commission.”⁸

In the lecture of “Jim Park”⁹ Biblical and Theological Foundations of Mission and in the lecture for Urban Mission he mentions about the wholistic ministry communion, community, and commission.¹⁰

In the local church the work of a pastor is not separated with the activity of the member and officers in the church (wholistic ministry).

2. Biblical and Theological Foundation of Wholistic Ministry

Williams said that “the goal of establishing a church is obviously not a building, but a congregation of Christians in a certain place.”¹¹ The simplest form is found in Matthew 18:20, “where two or three come together in My name, there am I with them.”

In Acts 2:42-47, the Bible provides pictures of the life and temper of the early church community: “And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need. So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.”

⁶ Ibid, 49.

⁷ Ronald T. Habermas, *How We Learn: A Christian Teacher's Guide to Educational Psychology* (Grand Rapid: Baker Book House, 1994), 173.

⁸ Ibid, 174.

⁹ Jim Park is the Proffessor in the area of World Mission in the Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies, Silang, Cavite, Phillippines.

¹⁰ Jim Park, Syllabus for MSSN 710 Biblical and Theological Foundations of Mission, Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies, Silang, Cavite, Philippines, 2006; See also Jim Park, Syllabus for MSSN 665 Urban Ministry and Mission, Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies, Silang, Cavite, Philippines, 2007.

¹¹ R. R. Williams, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Norwich, Great Britain: Fletcher and Son, 1953), 49.

2.1. Communion

The Greek term for communion is *koinonia*. The basic meanings of *Koinonia* are: “communion, close association, partnership.” This word was used in the contemporary Greek world to describe various close relationship among persons, as well as the mode of common life lived by followers of Pythagoras. In the book of Acts, this word denotes specifically a “communal manner of life.”¹²

The concept of the communion is primarily associated with early church. Exell explains that early church was emphasizing their religious life in four things. These four things are: Christian teaching, Christian fellowship, Christian sacrament, and communion with Jesus Christ and God.¹³ Furthermore, Fitzmyer said that “What the apostles taught was the basis for what the church of Luke’s own day was still teaching. *Koinonia*, “communal form of life,” is the first way that Luke names the Christian church in Acts; other designations will be used in addition to *ekklesia*, the standard name for the Christian community.”¹⁴

In the lecture of J. Park Biblical and Theological Foundations of Mission and in the lecture for Urban Mission he mentions about communion. Communion of the early church is included study the word and pray.¹⁵ “Communion with God begins with meaningful communication patterns like prayer and worship. . . Communion is being honest with God.”¹⁶

Ellen White says, “He who teaches the word must himself live in conscious, hourly communion with God through prayer and a study of His word, for here is the source of strength. Communion with God will impart to the minister's efforts a power greater than the influence of his preaching.”¹⁷

2.2. Community

The community of the early church is a representative of the family of God, keeping God’s law in an unbelieving population. Habermas says, “We are a select people, bonded together in Christ Jesus. Reflecting and maintaining this unity of fellowship is the goal of Community. We are “living stones,” who share the same “spiritual house.”¹⁸

In Acts 2:44, John Polhill elaborates on the fellowship enjoyed by the Christians. He explains that the word *koinonia* is not used, but other terms express the same reality. First, they are said to have been “together” (*epi to auto*). This Greek phrase is notoriously difficult to translate, occurring five times in Acts (1:15; 2:1, 44, 7; 4:26). It seems to depict the gathered community, with a strong emphasis on their unity. This unity is further expressed by their holding “everything in common” (which is described in verse 45 as selling their goods for the benefit of others whenever a need arose).¹⁹

¹² “Fellowship” (Acts 2:42), *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary (SDABC)*, rev. ed., ed. Francis D. Nichol (Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 1976-80, CD-ROM)

¹³ Joseph S. Exell, *The Acts*, The Biblical Illustrator (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1993), 270.

¹⁴ Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostle*, The Anchor Bible (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1987), 269.

¹⁵ Park, Syllabus for Biblical and Theological Foundations of Mission; Ibid, Syllabus for Urban Mission; “Together” (Acts 2:44), *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary (SDABC)*, rev. ed., ed. Francis D. Nichol (Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 1976-80, CD-ROM)

¹⁶ Habermas, *Teaching for Reconciliation*, 51.

¹⁷ Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostle* (Mountain View: Pacific Press, 1911), 362.

¹⁸ Habermas, *How We Learn*, 174.

¹⁹ John B. Polhill, *Acts*, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1992), 120.

Community is the second part that early church had. "The theme of community urges us to befriend our brothers and sisters in Christ."²⁰ J. Park also says community in the book of Acts is covered the small groups and worship.²¹

2.3. Character

True character is a quality of the soul. Christ desires His followers to reveal in their lives His character. "Character speaks of personal growth. Among other matters, dedication to God's word elicits such worthy ends. Believers, transformed on the first day of Pentecost, commenced character formation through the apostles' teaching (Acts 2:42)."²²

And again Habermas said that the reputation of the church-along with its size-had both qualitative and quantitative growth. And the theme of character originates in divine forgiveness.²³

White says: The glory of God is His character. . . . This character was revealed in the life of Christ. That He might by His own example condemn sin in the flesh, He took upon Himself the likeness of sinful flesh. Constantly He beheld the character of God; constantly He revealed this character to the world. Christ desires His followers to reveal in their lives this same character.²⁴

2.4. Commision

In Acts 2:47 mentions that the early church "winning the respect of all the people."²⁵ They served another people, and proclaimed the world of God. And the effect of their life style many people came to God.

According to J. Park the important result of the communion and community that early church had is commission. The early church served God in their life.²⁶

Ellen White says: The unselfish labor of Christians in the past should be to us an object lesson and an inspiration. The members of God's church are to be zealous of good works, separating from worldly ambition and walking in the footsteps of Him who went about doing good. With hearts filled with sympathy and compassion, they are to minister to those in need of help, bringing to sinners a knowledge of the Saviour's love. Such work calls for laborious effort, but it brings a rich reward. Those who engage in it with sincerity of purpose will see souls won to the Saviour, for the influence that attends the practical carrying out of the divine commission is irresistible.²⁷

"Finally, commission provides the church with its marching orders. Evangelism is pivotal. Yet, a more comprehensive understanding of "good news" is required."²⁸ White says, "the gospel commission is the great missionary charter of Christ's kingdom."²⁹

Therefore, there are four elements of wholistic ministry, according to J. Park and Habermas. There are:

1. Communion

²⁰ Habermas, *How We Learn*, 175.

²¹ Park, Syllabus for Urban Ministry.

²² Habermas. *Teaching for Reconciliation*, 50.

²³ Ibid, 50.

²⁴ Ellen G. White, *That I May Know Him* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1964), 131.

²⁵ Fitzmyer, 272; "Added" (Acts 2:47), *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary (SDABC)*, rev. ed., ed. Francis D. Nichol (Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 1976-80, CD-ROM)

²⁶ Park, Syllabus for Urban Mission.

²⁷ White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 109.

²⁸ Habermas. *Teaching for Reconciliation*, 50.

²⁹ White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 28.

- Study the word
 - Pray
- 2. Community
 - Small Groups
 - Worship
- 3. Character
 - Right Living³⁰
- 4. Commission
 - Serve God

3. Summary and Conclusion

Evangelization is big challenge for the mission of the church. It is the instruction of God to His people is to carry out the people from the darkness. Wholistic ministry is essential in order to do evangelism.

The wholistic ministry has four essential elements that cannot be separated. The four elements are communion, community, character and commission. A wholistic ministry approach that we use as a revival program in the church and also in communicating the gospel to the other people.

The Saviour's commission to the disciples included all the believers. It include all believers in Christ to the end of time. It is a fatal mistake to suppose that the work of saving souls depends alone on the ordained minister. All to whom the heavenly inspiration has come are put in trust with the gospel. All who receive the life of Christ are ordained to work for the salvation of their fellow men. For this work the church was established, and all who take upon themselves its sacred vows are thereby pledged to be co-workers with Christ.³¹

May God bless us when we applied the wholistic ministry approach in our ministry in the church and to other people.

³⁰ Habermas, *How We Learn*, 177.

³¹ Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1940), 822.

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